

A New Approach to Increase Consumer Understanding of Meal's Quality - Food Focus Instead of Nutrient Focus

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Abstract : The traditional and widely used nutrition-focused approach to communicate with consumers is reductionist and makes it difficult for consumers to assess their food intake. Without sufficient nutrition knowledge and understanding, it would be difficult to choose a healthful diet based only on nutritional recommendations. This study aimed to evaluate the understanding of how food/nutritional information is presented in menus to Portuguese consumers, comparing the nutrient-focused approach (currently used Nutrition Declaration) and the new food-focused approach (the infographic). For data collection, a questionnaire was distributed online using social media channels. A main effect of format on ratings of meal balance and completeness ($F_{\text{balance}}(1,79) = 18.26, p < .001, \eta^2 = .188$; $F_{\text{completeness}}(1,67) = 27.18, p < .001, \eta^2 = .289$). Overall, dishes paired with the nutritional information were rated as more balanced ($M_{\text{balance}} = 3.70, SE = .11$; $M_{\text{completeness}} = 4.00, SE = .14$) than meals with the infographic representation ($M_{\text{balance}} = 3.14, SE = .11$; $M_{\text{completeness}} = 3.29, SE = .13$). We also observed a main effect of the meal, $F(3,237) = 48.90, p < .001, \eta^2 = .382$, such that M1 and M2 were perceived as less balanced than the M3 and M4, all $p < .001$. The use of a food-focused approach (infographic) helped participants identify the lack of balance in the less healthful meals (dishes M1 and M2), allowing for a better understanding of meals' compliance with recommendations contributing to better food choices and a healthier lifestyle.

Keywords : food labelling, food and nutritional recommendations, infographics, portions based information

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